

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
RACE TO THE TOP FUND – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
NOTICE OF PROPOSED PRIORITIES, REQUIREMENTS, DEFINITIONS, AND SELECTION CRITERIA**

**BACKGROUND**

On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), historic legislation designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education. The ARRA lays the foundation for education reform by supporting investments in innovative strategies that are most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness.

The ARRA provides \$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top Fund, a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas:

- Adopting internationally-benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- Recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals;
- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; and
- Turning around our lowest-performing schools.

**TIMING OF APPLICATIONS AND AWARDS**

The Department plans to make Race to the Top grants in two phases. States that are ready to apply may do so in Phase 1, which will open in late calendar year 2009. States that need more time – for example, to engage in planning with and secure commitments from superintendents, school boards, principals, teachers, union leaders, and community supporters, or others – may apply in Phase 2, which will open in late Spring of calendar year 2010. States that apply in Phase 1 but are not awarded grants may reapply for funding in Phase 2, together with States that are applying for the first time in Phase 2. Phase 1 grantees may not apply for additional funding in Phase 2. We will announce specific deadlines for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 in subsequent notice(s) inviting applications for funds under this program.

**PROPOSED ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

We are proposing two eligibility requirements for Race to the Top applicants. A potential State applicant that does not meet both of these requirements will be ineligible to apply for a Race to the Top grant.

- In order for a State to be eligible for the Race to the Top Phase 1 competition, the State's applications for funding under Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Stabilization program must be approved by the Department by December 31, 2009. In order for the State to be eligible for the Race to the Top Phase 2 competition, the State's application for funding under Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Stabilization program must be approved by the Department prior to the State submitting its Race to the Top Phase 2 application.
- In order for a State to be eligible for the Race to the Top Phase 1 or Phase 2 competition, the State must not have any legal, statutory, or regulatory barriers to linking data on student achievement or student growth to teachers and principals for the purpose of teacher and principal evaluation.

## **ABSOLUTE PRIORITY**

Under an absolute priority, we would consider only applications that meet the priority. Below is the proposed absolute priority for this competition.

### **Comprehensive Approach to the Four Education Reform Areas**

The State's application must comprehensively address each of the four education reform areas to demonstrate that the State and its participating LEAs are taking a systemic approach to education reform. The State's application must describe how the State and participating LEAs intend to use Race to the Top and other funds to implement comprehensive and coherent policies and practices in the four education reform areas, and how these are designed to increase student achievement, reduce the achievement gap across student subgroups, and increase the rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for college and careers.

## **PROPOSED SELECTION CRITERIA**

### **Summary of Selection Criteria**

There are 19 selection criteria that the Department proposes States address when submitting their applications. Each is outlined below.

#### *Standards and Assessments*

1. Developing and adopting common standards
2. Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments
3. Supporting transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments

#### *Data Systems to Support Instruction*

1. Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system
2. Accessing and using State data
3. Using data to improve instruction

#### *Great Teachers and Leaders*

1. Providing alternative pathways for aspiring teachers and principals
2. Differentiating teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance
3. Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals
4. Reporting the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs
5. Providing effective support to teachers and principals

#### *Turning Around Struggling Schools*

1. Intervening in the lowest-performing schools and LEAs
2. Increasing the supply of high-quality charter schools
3. Turning around struggling schools

#### *Overall Criteria*

1. Demonstrating significant progress
2. Making education funding a priority
3. Enlisting statewide support and commitment
4. Raising achievement and closing gaps
5. Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale, and sustain proposed plans

## **Structure of Selection Criteria**

The proposed Race to the Top selection criteria outlined above are broken out into two types. The Department expects successful applicants to clear a high bar on both:

- *State Reform Conditions* Criteria reward States that have demonstrated their will and capacity to significantly improve their education systems by creating legal, regulatory, and other conditions conducive to reform and innovation. States will be judged by the extent of their accomplishments in these areas prior to the application deadline.
- *Reform Plan* Criteria refer to the comprehensive reform strategies that States would develop and implement, together with their participating LEAs, across and within each of the four education reform areas – all with a goal of improving future student outcomes. States will be judged by the quality of their plans and by the extent to which they have set targets that are ambitious yet achievable.

Each criterion is described in detail below. For the full text of each criterion and all additional information, please refer to the Race to the Top Notice of Proposed Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria.

## **Detailed Selection Criteria**

### **A. Standards and Assessments**

#### *State Reform Conditions Criteria*

##### (A)(1) Developing and adopting common standards:

- For Phase 1 applications: The extent to which the State has demonstrated commitment to improving the quality of its standards by participating in a consortium of States that is working toward jointly developing and adopting, by June 2010, a common set of K-12 standards that are internationally benchmarked and that build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation, and the extent to which this consortium includes a significant number of States.
- For Phase 2 applications: Whether the State has demonstrated commitment to improving the quality of its standards by adopting, as part of a multi-State consortium, a common set of K-12 standards that are internationally benchmarked and that build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation, and the extent to which this consortium includes a significant number of States.

##### (A)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments:

- Whether the State has demonstrated a commitment to improving the quality of its assessments by participating in a consortium of States that is working toward jointly developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments aligned with the consortium's common set of K-12 standards that are internationally benchmarked and that build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation, and the extent to which this consortium includes a significant number of States.

#### *Reform Plan Criteria*

##### (A)(3) Supporting transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments:

- The extent to which the State, in collaboration with its participating LEAs, has a high-quality plan for supporting a statewide transition to and implementation of (a) internationally benchmarked K-12 standards that build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation, and (b) high-quality assessments tied to these standards. State or LEA activities might include: aligning high school exit criteria and college entrance requirements with the new assessments; developing, disseminating, and implementing curricular frameworks and materials, formative and interim assessments,

and professional development materials; and engaging in other strategies that translate the standards and information from assessments into classroom practice.

## **B. Data Systems to Support Instruction**

### *State Reform Conditions Criteria*

#### (B)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system:

- The extent to which the State has a statewide longitudinal data system that includes all of the elements of the America COMPETES Act.

### *Reform Plan Criteria*

#### (B)(2) Accessing and using State data:

- The extent to which the State has a high-quality plan to ensure that data from the State's statewide longitudinal data system are accessible to, and used to inform and engage, as appropriate, key stakeholders (*e.g.*, parents, students, teachers, principals, LEA leaders, community members, unions, researchers, and policymakers); that the data support decision-makers in the continuous improvement of instruction, operations, management, and resource allocation; and that they comply with the applicable requirements of FERPA.

#### (B)(3) Using data to improve instruction:

The extent to which the State, in collaboration with its participating LEAs, has a high-quality plan to:

- Increase the use of instructional improvement systems that provide teachers, principals, and administrators with the information they need to inform and improve their instructional practices, decision-making, and overall effectiveness; and
- Make these data, together with statewide longitudinal data system data, available and accessible to researchers so that they have detailed information with which to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional materials, strategies, and approaches for educating different types of students (*e.g.*, students with disabilities, limited English proficient students, students whose achievement is well below or above grade level), in a manner that complies with the applicable requirements of FERPA.

## **C. Great Teachers and Leaders**

### *State Reform Conditions Criteria*

#### (C)(1) Providing alternative pathways for aspiring teachers and principals:

- The extent to which the State has in place legal, statutory, or regulatory provisions that allow alternative routes to certification for teachers and principals, particularly routes that allow for providers in addition to institutions of higher education; and the extent to which these routes are in use.

### *Reform Plan Criteria*

#### (C)(2) Differentiating teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance:

- The extent to which the State, in collaboration with its participating LEAs, has a high-quality plan and ambitious yet achievable annual targets to (a) determine an approach to measuring student growth; (b) employ rigorous, transparent, and equitable processes for differentiating the effectiveness of teachers and principals using multiple rating categories that take into account data on student growth as a significant factor; (c) provide to each teacher and principal his or her own data and rating; and (d) use this information when making decisions regarding:
  - Evaluating annually and developing teachers and principals, including by providing timely and constructive feedback and targeted professional development;
  - Compensating and promoting teachers and principals, including by providing opportunities for teachers and principals who are highly effective to obtain additional compensation and responsibilities; and

- Granting tenure to and dismissing teachers and principals based on rigorous and transparent procedures for awarding tenure (where applicable) and for removing tenured and untenured teachers and principals after they have had ample opportunities to improve but have not done so.

(C)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals:

- The extent to which the State has a high-quality plan and ambitious yet achievable annual targets to increase the number and percentage of highly effective teachers and principals in high-poverty schools, and to increase the number and percentage of effective teachers teaching hard-to-staff subjects including mathematics, science, special education, English language proficiency, and other hard-to-staff subjects identified by the State or LEA. Plans may include, but are not limited to, the implementation of incentives and strategies in areas such as recruitment, compensation, career development, and human resources practices and processes.

(C)(4) Reporting the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs:

- The extent to which the State has a high-quality plan and ambitious yet achievable annual targets to link a student's achievement data to the student's teachers and principals, to link this information to the programs where each of those teachers and principals was prepared for credentialing, and to publicly report the findings for each credentialing program that has twenty or more graduates annually.

(C)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals:

- The extent to which the State, in collaboration with its participating LEAs, has a high-quality plan to use rapid-time student data to inform and guide the support provided to teachers and principals (*e.g.*, professional development, time for common planning and collaboration) in order to improve the overall effectiveness of instruction; and to continuously measure and improve both the effectiveness and efficiency of those supports.

## **D. Turning Around Struggling Schools**

### *State Reform Conditions Criteria*

(D)(1) Intervening in the lowest-performing schools and LEAs:

- The extent to which the State has the legal, statutory, or regulatory authority to intervene directly in the State's persistently lowest-performing schools and in LEAs that are in improvement and corrective action status.

(D)(2) Increasing the supply of high-quality charter schools:

- The extent to which the State has a charter school law that does not prohibit or effectively inhibit increasing the number of charter schools in the State (as measured by the percentage of total schools in the State that are allowed to be charter schools) or otherwise restrict student enrollment in charter schools.
- The extent to which the State has statutes and guidelines regarding how charter school authorizers approve, monitor, hold accountable, reauthorize, and close charter schools, including the extent to which such statutes or guidelines require that student academic achievement be a factor in such activities and decisions, and the extent to which charter school authorizers in the State have closed or not renewed ineffective charters.
- The extent to which the State's charter schools receive equitable funding, compared to traditional public schools, and a commensurate share of local, State, and Federal program and revenue sources.
- The extent to which the State provides charter schools with facilities funding (for leasing facilities, purchasing facilities, or making tenant improvements), assistance with facilities acquisition, access to public facilities, the ability to share in bonds and mill levies, or other supports; and the extent to which the State does not impose any facility-related requirements on charter schools that are stricter than those applied to traditional public schools.

## *Reform Plan Criteria*

### (D)(3) Turning around struggling schools:

- The extent to which the State has a high-quality plan and ambitious yet achievable annual targets to (i) identify at least the lowest-achieving five percent of the persistently lowest-performing schools or the lowest-achieving five schools, whichever is larger; and (ii) support its LEAs in turning around these schools by:
  - Putting in place new leadership and a majority of new staff, new governance, and improved instructional programs, and providing the school with flexibilities such as the ability to select staff, control its budget, and expand student learning time; or
  - Converting them to charter schools or contracting with an education management organization; or
  - Closing the school and placing the school's students in high-performing schools; or
  - To the extent that these strategies are not possible, implementing a school transformation model that includes: hiring a new principal, measuring teacher and principal effectiveness, rewarding effective teachers and principals, and improving strategies for recruitment, retention and professional development; implementing comprehensive instructional reform, including an improved instructional program and differentiated instruction; and extending learning time and community-oriented supports, including more time for students to learn and for teachers to collaborate, more time for enrichment activities, and on-going mechanisms for family and community engagement.

## **E. Overall Selection Criteria**

### *State Reform Conditions Criteria*

#### (E)(1) Demonstrating significant progress:

The extent to which the State has, over the past several years:

- Made progress to date in each of the four education reform areas;
- Used ARRA and other Federal and State funding to pursue reforms in these areas;
- Created, through law or policy, conditions favorable to education reform and innovation; and
- Increased student achievement and decreased the achievement gap, as reported on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since 2003; and increased graduation rates.

#### (E)(2) Making education funding a priority:

- The extent to which the percentage of the total revenues available to the State that were used to support elementary, secondary, and public higher education for FY 2009 was greater than or equal to the percentage of the total revenues available to the State that were used to support elementary, secondary, and public higher education for FY 2008.

#### (E)(3) Enlisting statewide support and commitment:

- The extent to which the State has demonstrated commitment, support, and/or funding from the following key stakeholders:
  - The State's teachers' union(s) and charter school authorizers;
  - Other State and local leaders (*e.g.*, business, community, civil rights, and education association leaders);
  - Grant-making foundations and other funding sources; and
  - LEAs, including public charter schools identified as LEAs under State law, with special emphasis on the following: high-need LEAs; participation by LEAs, schools, students, and students in poverty; and the strength of the Memoranda of Understanding between LEAs and the State, which must at a minimum be signed by the LEA superintendent (or equivalent), the president of the local school board (if relevant), and the local teachers' union leader (if relevant).

## *Reform Plan Criteria*

### (E)(4) Raising achievement and closing gaps:

- Achievement gains: The extent to which the State has set ambitious yet achievable targets for increasing its students' achievement results overall and by student subgroup in reading and mathematics, as reported by the NAEP; annual targets using other assessments may be submitted as well.
- Gap closing: The extent to which the State has set ambitious yet achievable targets for decreasing the reading and mathematics achievement gaps between subgroups, as reported, at a minimum, by the NAEP; annual targets using other assessments may be submitted as well.
- Graduation rate: The extent to which the State has ambitious yet achievable annual targets for increasing graduation rates overall and by student subgroup.

### (E)(5) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale, and sustain proposed plans:

The extent to which the State has a high-quality overall plan that demonstrates how it has, and will continue to build, the capacity to:

- Effectively and efficiently oversee the grant, including administering, disbursing funds, and, if necessary, taking appropriate enforcement actions to ensure that participating LEAs comply with the State's plan and program requirements;
- Support the success of participating LEAs, ensure the dissemination of effective practices, and hold participating LEAs accountable for progress;
- Use the economic, political, and human capital resources of the State to continue the reforms funded under the grant after the period of funding has ended;
- Collaborate with other States on key elements of or activities in the State's application; and
- Coordinate, reallocate, or repurpose education funds from other sources to align with the State's Race to the Top goals, as outlined in its plans.

## **PROPOSED PRIORITIES**

Under a competitive preference priority, we would give competitive preference to an application by awarding additional points, depending on the extent to which the application meets the priority or selecting an application that meets the priority over an application of comparable merit that does not. With an invitational priority, we signal our interest in receiving applications that meet the priority; however, we would not give an application that meets an invitational priority preference over other applications.

### Emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) – Competitive Preference Priority

- To meet this priority, the State's application must describe plans to address the need to:
  - Offer a rigorous course of study in mathematics, sciences, technology, and engineering;
  - Cooperate with industry experts, museums, universities, research centers, or other STEM-capable community partners to prepare and assist teachers in integrating STEM content across grades and disciplines, in promoting effective and relevant instruction, and in offering applied learning opportunities for students; and
  - Prepare more students for advanced study and careers in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics, including addressing the needs of underrepresented groups and of women and girls in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

### Expansion and Adaptation of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems – Invitational Priority

- The Secretary is particularly interested in applications in which the State plans to expand statewide longitudinal data systems to include or integrate data from special education programs, limited English proficiency programs, early childhood programs, human resources, finance, health, postsecondary, and

other relevant areas, with the purpose of allowing important questions related to policy or practice to be asked and answered.

- The Secretary is also particularly interested in applications in which States propose working together to adapt one State's statewide longitudinal data system so that it may be used, in whole or in part, by other State(s), rather than having each State build or continue building such system(s) from scratch or independently.

#### P-20 Coordination and Vertical Alignment – Invitational Priority

- The Secretary is particularly interested in applications in which the State plans to address how early childhood programs, K-12 schools, postsecondary institutions, and workforce organizations will coordinate to improve all parts of the education system and create a more seamless P-20 route for students. Vertical alignment across P-20 is particularly critical at each point where a transition occurs (*e.g.*, between early childhood and K-12, or between K-12 and postsecondary) to ensure that students exiting one level are prepared for success, without remediation, in the next.

#### School-Level Conditions for Reform and Innovation – Invitational Priority

- The Secretary is particularly interested in applications in which the State's participating LEAs provide schools, where appropriate, with flexibilities and autonomies conducive to reform and innovation, such as:
  - Selecting staff;
  - Implementing new structures and formats for the school day or year that expand learning time;
  - Placing budgets under the schools' control;
  - Awarding credit to students based on student performance instead of instructional time; and
  - Providing comprehensive services to high-need students (*e.g.*, through local partnerships, internal staffing, and contracts with outside providers).